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SUBJECT: BASRA: THE SLUMS OF HAYYANIYAH

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¶11. (SBU) Summary. Hayyaniyah is a poor and politically sensitive Basra city neighborhood with a history very similar to Baghdad's Sadr City. Wracked by extreme poverty, high unemployment, and an extremely dense population, the enclave of about 300,000 is largely comprised of Shi'a Marsh Arabs from surrounding rural and tribal areas who have arrived in waves over recent decades. Though other Basrawis often stereotype the inhabitants of Hayyaniyah as poor, illiterate and potentially criminal, there is a recognition of their toughness and resilience. While Hayyaniyah was a militia stronghold in the past, today provincial and military officials insist that this threat is dramatically diminished. In the past, Hayyaniyah was such a notorious slum that even Saddam's police left it alone. Today's provincial government is far more involved, but efforts are still inadequate in the face of the neighborhood's poverty and density. Working with local officials, the USG has many initiatives to improve the delivery of essential services. Those efforts cannot and should not be a substitute for the elected provincial government's own solutions to the enclave's deep-seated problems. Hayyaniyah remains one of Basra's most vulnerable and precarious neighborhoods. End summary.

History

¶12. (SBU) Then president Abdul Karim Qassim established Hayyaniyah in 1958 as a public housing project for former rural agricultural workers in Basra and other rural southern provinces. The beneficiaries were particularly Marsh Arabs from Basra, Maysan, and Dhi Qar Provinces that had moved to Basra City to find work. The area was officially known as Hay Al-Husayn, but residents began calling it Al-Hayyaniyah after then-Governor Muhammad Al-Hayani. The Iraqi agricultural sector was suffering from a severe economic crisis as the oil industry began to expand. The result was a significant rural exodus to Iraqi cities. Government officials parceled the area into thousands of 100 square meter sections. Residents later subdivided these plots as the number of inhabitants grew, often sharing their land with extended family members. At first the houses were made of mud; the government later began building them of cement blocks; still later, some streets were paved.

¶13. (SBU) Another well known public housing project also developed in Baghdad at the same time, also on Qasim's order: "Revolutionary City," now known as Sadr City. It was designed and built by the same architect for the same purpose. Both are densely-populated and impoverished, comprised primarily of Shi'a, have histories of militia activity, and could be catalysts for instability.

Demographics: The Young and the Restless

¶14. (SBU) The population of Hayyaniyah has grown over the years. As with much of Iraq, the PRT is unaware of any official

population estimates, but most contacts and analysts place it in the range of 300,000, about the same density as very-high-density city states of Macau, Singapore, and Hong Kong. (Note: Hayyaniyah is the name for the both the original, 1.2-square-mile enclave, as well as the roughly twice as large surrounding sub-district which encompasses a few other slums of similar socioeconomic situation. For most Basrawis, "Hayyaniyah" refers to this latter area. End note.) According to a recent DoD Human Terrain Team (HTT) study, the average household is comprised of around 8-10 people, usually living in two rooms (each about 540 square feet). Provincial government data places a staggering 50% of the population under 25 years old. Formal unemployment rates are well over 30%.

Social outcasts and negative stereotypes

¶15. (SBU) Most of Hayyaniyah's original and subsequent arrivals came from rural and tribal areas largely lacking schools, hospitals, electricity, and running water. Many had lived in reed huts in the marshes. Those who took refuge in the city found assimilation, to the extent they attempted to assimilate, difficult. Tribal values and traditions are still evident as different sections of Hayyaniyah display their own distinctive tribal norms. Most early arrivals were semi-literate at best, and subsequent generations appear to be caught up in a vicious cycle. Primary school completion rates are much lower than Iraq as a whole.

¶16. (SBU) For middle class Basrawis, relations with public housing enclaves such as Hayyaniyah have always been uneasy. Other Basrawis sometimes stigmatize the "Ma'dan" or "Garamsha" (names of some of the more prominent Marsh Arab tribes) as illiterate, criminal, and all "from Maysan with 10 kids." They consider the neighborhood a crowded maze of open sewers and trash-strewn walkways with high levels of crime. They

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generalize large households crammed together in ramshackle homes, dogs and goats feeding on heaps of garbage, all suffering from insufficient supplies of water and electricity. Consequently, a resident of Hayyaniyah--often identifiable by dress, accent, or surname--can sometimes face impediments to employment and marriage prospects.

But the truth is more complex

¶17. (SBU) While some of these stereotypes have foundation in reality, they can be a caricature. Hayyaniyah faces massive problems, but few areas of the city are without them. The rate of formal unemployment is high, but people are not idle. There is an active informal employment network. Most residents are proud of their neighborhood. Many jobs are menial and informal (largely construction), but Hayyaniyah is also home to some educated professionals - doctors, lawyers, and engineers - who live in some of the relatively cleaner and safer areas of Hayyaniyah. Many Basrawis will also openly acknowledge their respect and admiration for Hayyaniyans' toughness and fortitude. They are well aware that the 1991 uprising began in Hayyaniyah, and that thousands from that district paid with their lives. According to the Basra Investment Commission Chairman, many residents of Hayyaniyah own their own property. It is not an insignificant asset; depending on location, it can be worth as much as USD 50,000-USD 100,000.

Ethnic, Tribal Composition

¶18. (SBU) According to a recent HTT analysis, up to 95% of Hayyaniyah's population consists of Shi'a Marsh Arabs that have arrived in irregular waves since 1958, and with only small changes since 2003. Deciphering the precise tribal and ethnic composition is more difficult. The HTT and GOI's Ministry of Interior's Directorate of Tribal Affairs contends that Hayyaniyah has several major and mixed tribes, mainly the Albu

Muhammad/Al-Zubaydi and Al-Muntafaq confederation, the latter which encompasses the influential Al-Maliki (or Bani Malik) sub tribe, related to the Prime Minister. Apart from the Maysan and Dhi Qar marsh areas, the remaining population comes from Baghdad, the Middle Euphrates, other northern and western provinces, and tribes straddling the Iraq-Kuwait border.

Waves of internally displaced

¶ 9. (SBU) After its 1958 beginning as a home for economically displaced Iraqis, the first large-scale wave of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (also largely Marsh Arabs) came in the wake of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War. A second wave, also of Marsh Arabs, arrived in the 1990s, comprised of those driven out by Saddam who had punished them for their uprising against him during the first Gulf War by destroying their marshes and traditional habitat. A third wave came after 2003. Like Basra City and Province, the majority of IDPs have been there since before 2003 invasion, with relatively small changes since. After decades of distinct IDP waves, today it is hard to say for certain who is an IDP and who is a settled resident. The HTT study cited International Organization of Migration and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees figures indicating that about 5-15% of Hayyaniyah's population is recently displaced persons, the majority of whom came after 2003.

Many have returned; some have stayed

¶ 10. (SBU) As the security situation has improved, many of the more recent IDPs have returned to their villages, and sometimes with the assistance of the ISF and other GOI agencies. In the case of those who remain and who had fled other urban areas, some lack the money to rebuild destroyed homes. Others find former homes are occupied and residents unwilling to return the property to the original family. Some are reluctant to return to where a loved one was killed. In still other cases, some have stayed in Hayyaniyah due to better economic opportunities or a more promising life for themselves and their children in Iraq's second largest city. As the cost of living is less than in Baghdad, some can buy or build homes in Hayyaniyah.

Past militia control

¶ 11. (SBU) Hayyaniyah was a Jayash al Mahdi (JAM) stronghold leading up to the March 2008 Charge of the Knights campaign when Coalition Forces and the ISF reclaimed this Sadrists stronghold. Local sheikhs have told us that they "lost control" of some of their tribe members during this time to the militias. Today, while some observers assert that Hayyaniyah could still be an active breeding ground for Iran-backed militias such as the JAM,

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the PRT's Basra military and police contacts insist that the JAM presence and threat has dramatically decreased. In any event, both sides agree that the JAM still enjoys some amount of local support and some isolated JAM elements could still be resident there. Given the enclave's extreme poverty, it remains a potential militia recruitment center. Local sheikhs have also told us that Iranian officials frequently visit the area, and discuss assistance projects - but nothing has come to fruition so far.

A more involved, but still ineffective, government

¶ 12. (SBU) Hayyaniyah was such a notorious slum that even Saddam's security forces largely left it alone. Saddam also considered it to be inhabited by criminals or anti-Baathist elements. Today's provincial government is much more involved and making a credible attempt to improve the situation. It is still insufficient. They face massive challenges. While the provision of basic services (water, sewage, electricity, trash removal) still falls far short, contrary to the claims of some

local sheikhs and others, the enclave actually receives roughly the same amount and quality of services as other neighborhoods. The problem is that this supply is overwhelmed by the sheer density and poverty of Hayyaniyah, and years of neglect means that the infrastructure is that more degraded. Illegal housing, off-the-grid electricity hook-ups, squatters, and non-licensed markets overstrain services exacerbating the prevalence of blackouts, irregular supplies of water, open sewers, and insufficient trash removal. Though this is common throughout Basra, the situation is worse in Hayyaniyah. The Directors General of water, sewage, electricity, and trash indicate that they do not have the authority to hook up illegal homes and markets to their services. The government plans to move some of these unauthorized residents to new homes (the "one thousand homes" project), but supplies are limited, and such moves could also disrupt some residents' work and family networks. The ISF has also done some limited recruitment drives in Hayyaniyah.

U.S. and other donor engagement

¶13. (SBU) Hayyaniyah has been a focus of USG assistance efforts in recent years, including those of the 364th Civil Affairs Brigade, the 34th Infantry Division, the Task Force for Business Stability Operations (TFBSO), the 2nd Brigade Combat Team (2/4 BCT), the 17th Fires Brigade (17FiB), USAID, and the PRT. Other foreign donors, international organizations and NGOs have also have been involved. The 17FiB, working with local DGs, has programs for water, electricity, solid waste, and sewage, and is also contemplating a schools infrastructure effort. TFBSO is presently rehabilitating an open air market. The 2/4 BCT removed an enormous scrap metal heap in Hayyaniyah. The United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) constructed several water towers which the GOI and the 17Fib, with CERP funds, plans to connect to the Hayyaniyah water distribution network. All these efforts are not without risks: 17Fib teams entering the neighborhood are sometimes greeted with rocks, and one soldier recently had his jaw broken and some teeth knocked out during a recent mission.

Comment: Elected government must do its job

¶14. (SBU) The poorest of Basra's poor, Hayyaniyah problems can appear almost insurmountable. Like poor neighborhoods in virtually any city in the world, the problems are deep-seated in nature, and there are no easy fixes. The provincial government has slowly begun to step up its efforts to improve services, but much more is needed, including in the areas of reconciliation, job creation, and education. The many USG efforts to provide essential services are important. At the same time, they should not be a substitute for the proper role of the elected provincial government assisting one of Basra's most vulnerable and precarious neighborhoods. End comment.

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